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MARR, PREL, PINR, AMGT, EAID, AQ, LA, RP, TN, VM, WS

SUBJECT: INDONESIA EARTHQUAKE HUMANITARIAN UPDATE #10: FOOD
SECURITY AND AGRICULTURE NEEDS NOT CRITICAL AT PRESENT BUT MAY
INCREASE

Summary

1. The USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team (USAID/DART) has assessed food security and agriculture conditions in earthquake-affected Agam, Pariaman, and Padang Pariaman districts. The earthquake resulted in the loss of many families' rice stocks and damaged irrigation infrastructure considerably in some areas. However, the quake did not significantly disrupt the current agricultural season. At present, charitable giving, emergency food assistance, and market purchases are meeting families' immediate needs for short-term food assistance. While food is not currently a critical issue, without sufficient assistance through the next harvest season, household-level food insecurity of affected populations may significantly increase. The USAID/DART will continue to monitor food security and agricultural conditions of earthquake-affected populations. End summary.

Food Security and Agriculture Needs Assessment

2. Since arriving in Padang, the USAID/DART field officer has assessed food security and agriculture in 13 villages in Agam, Pariaman, and Padang Pariaman districts. Through meetings with Government of Indonesia (GoI) representatives, interviews with earthquake-affected families, and assessments of irrigation infrastructure, the USAID/DART has obtained a clearer picture of current food security and agriculture conditions. Most affected families interviewed by the USAID/DART ranked obtaining food -- specifically rice -- as their first or second priority at present.

-- Food Stocks Lost --

3. The September 30 earthquake in West Sumatra did not interrupt the primary rice planting or harvest seasons. Where fields remain undamaged and where water irrigation systems are still operable, the rice crop should be ready to harvest in three to four months. Because the agricultural cycle has not been interrupted, long-term

food distributions are not needed.

¶4. The most recent rice harvest occurred in mid-August, just prior to Ramadan. Families reported storing harvested rice in their houses for consumption until the next harvest, expected in January and February. Most families reported growing enough rice to sustain the family until the next harvest without having to rely on market purchase.

¶5. However, the recent earthquake damaged many homes and, in the process, caused a significant number of families to lose their rice stocks for the coming three months. The loss of household stocks has forced many families to rely on market purchases to make up for the shortfall of rice. Rice traders interviewed by the USAID/DART field officer reported that the increase in demand across the earthquake-affected region for rice purchase has led to an increase in price. Market assessments indicate that, on average, the cost of rice has increased by 30 percent since prior to the earthquake. The increase in the price of rice combined with families' reliance on market purchase creates the potential for increasing household-level food insecurity by limiting families' access to food.

-- Damage to Infrastructure --

¶6. According to the USAID/DART field officer, the earthquake caused considerable damage to irrigation canals in pockets of areas. The damage was due to landslides that directly damaged irrigation infrastructure or that blocked rivers, re-directing water away from irrigation systems.

¶7. Irrigation systems need to be restored before agricultural

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production of rice can continue without interruption. However, the next rice-growing season relies on rainfall and is not dependent on irrigation systems being intact for crops to grow. The USAID/DART is making inquiries with partners to gauge interest in addressing the irrigation canal issue. The USAID/DART will continue to monitor the situation.

-- Addressing Needs through Social Capital --

¶8. The USAID/DART field officer has noted the high social capital of the area, as many donations of food from unaffected communities throughout Indonesia continue to be delivered to needy families. One family remarked that they lacked food but were not worried because food arrives every day from better-off communities. The potential duration of these community-help efforts is not clear. In some areas, these charitable distributions are meeting an immediate need for food, thereby allowing families to spend money on other items needed for recovery.

-- Addressing Needs through Emergency Food Assistance --

¶9. The U.N. World Food Program (WFP) and the GoI are coordinating food distributions. Currently, WFP is distributing noodles and biscuits, while the GoI is distributing cash and rice for one month's requirement. The GoI program distributes \$70 per earthquake-affected family to cover food needs for one month, using a five-member per household average. WFP has redirected noodles and biscuits from the Aceh program and has appealed for funding through the Humanitarian Response Plan to continue this program for three months. (Comment: The USAID/DART has already observed upward pressure on rice prices as families that do not normally purchase rice begin to do so. In some places, food distributions will need to continue until the next rice harvest occurs, especially for poorer households. Whether the GoI program will continue past the one-month ration, thereby raising additional household-level food security concerns by sustaining upward pressure on rice prices, is unclear. End comment.)

USAID/DART Activities to Monitor Needs

¶10. While food is not currently a critical issue, without

sufficient assistance through the next harvest season, household-level food insecurity of affected populations may significantly increase. Through late November, the USAID/DART will maintain two field officers in Padang who will continue to monitor this situation.

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